Enemies Closer

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Enemies Closer

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Cardassian in exile, Hann Lektor, takes an interest in the station's resident Entomologist, Will Graham. The feeling is not mutual.

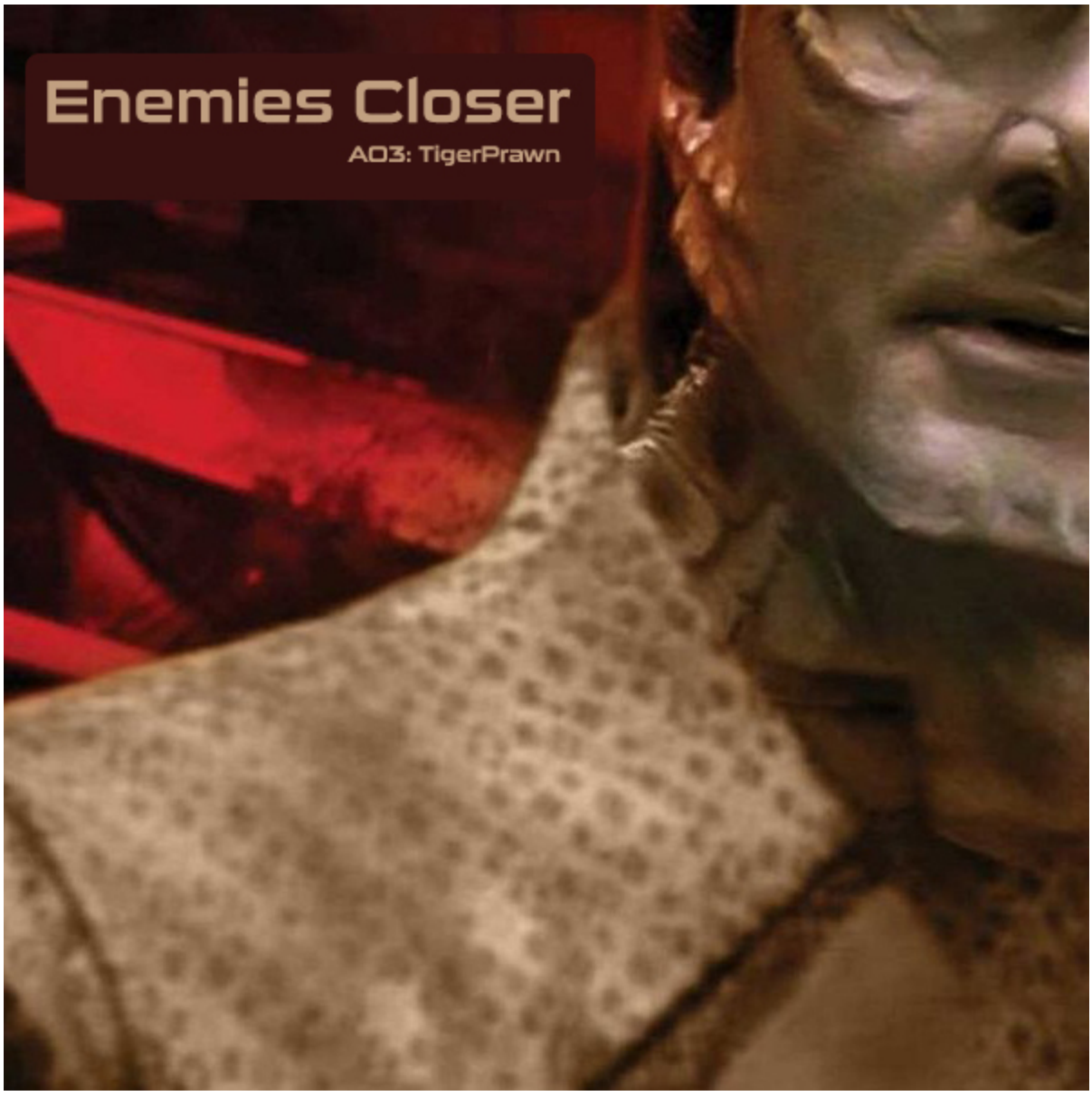
Notes

Note: Hannibal's name in this is Hann Lektor, in an attempt to Cardassianise it somewhat.

Further Note: I've actually had this sort of Hannibal as Garak/Will as Bashir thing in my head for a looooong time, but I couldn't find a way to make it work in my head. Then one day it all clicked together. And my fellow Garashir fan PangaeaStarSeed has created a wonderful piece of art - inserted in the fic and also on twitter

Dedicated to another Garashir shipper - Bryan Fuller! 😂🙌

Chapter 1



The door to the lab opened and Will looked up to see an unexpected visitor. And one he wasn't inclined to afford any hospitality to. Will didn't claim to be the friendliest of people, but there was nothing about to convince him to be overly civil to a Cardassian.

"Good morning." The Cardassian's words were cool and calm and sent a chill up Will's spine. He continued in that same soft and slightly seductive tone his whole species seemed to have, "It's Doctor Graham isn't it? Of course it is," he answered his own question jovially. "May I introduce myself?"

"I'd rather you didn't," Will gave him a hard look from where he stood at his lab station, before looking back down at his work.

He'd already heard the gossip around the station that a Cardassian had remained aboard. A tailor that was just as likely a spy. The Cardassian had plenty of people a flutter. And perhaps when Will had been fresh out of the Academy, he might have been more interested in the gossip. But years in security detail, spent mostly along the Cardassian border before and during the Border Wars, had hardened him. Being captured and tortured by them had hardened him.

More than that. It had nearly broken him. He was too unstable now to even consider continuing a career in the field. And so he had gone back to his roots, back to studying entomology as he had at the Academy. When the chance came up to study the bugs of a new planet in the Federation - of Bajor - he'd jumped at it. He had to admit he was keen to be at the new frontier of a planet with its own wormhole. One that promised much in the way of exploration and new findings.

But that wasn't the only draw. The fact that he could understand something of the plight of people, oppressed by the Cardassians, pulled him there. In fact, there was some sort of safety he felt there, like it was the last place he'd ever encounter a Cardassian again now they'd withdrawn from the system.

He had been wrong.

The Cardassian let out an amused sound, not apparently taking any hint or offence, as he continued.

"I need medical assistance, of a kind." The Cardassian continued when Will didn't answer.

Will bristled at his station in the lab. *Clearly* the lab, not the infirmary. He wasn't fool enough to think the Cardassian hadn't realised that, and wasn't exactly where he wanted to be.

"You know, some people say that you remained on Deep Space Nine as the eyes and ears of your fellow Cardassians," Will said, pointedly. Leaving unsaid the *so why the fuck would I want anything to do with you*. If the man needed any more reason than just the fact that he was Cardassian.

He let out an amused, dry chuckle. "Doctor, you're not intimating that I'm some sort of spy, are you?"

Will looked back up at the amused glint in the Cardassian's eyes and the gentle curve of his mouth. There was something he'd always found quite terrifying about an amused Cardassian. Or perhaps it was just at the sort of things that amused them? Many of which he'd experienced first hand.

"I'm not a medical doctor," Will replied bluntly, ignoring the invitation to engage further.

"Oh it isn't myself that needs attending. I have some Cardassian mealgrubs that appear to be sickening for something." The man sounded fucking pleasant. Like he wasn't a monster like the rest of them. Why were they all like that?

Will looked up again to confirm what he already knew, the coldness there. In the man's eyes, despite his smile. They really were all the same. All these damn lizards.

"I'm not a vet either," Will growled the words and moved to the station where his objects of study resided, his back now to the Cardassian, hopeful he'd just leave. Will continued with his work, placing some of the Bajoran foliage Keiko O'Brien had given him and putting it in with the insects he had retrieved on his first trip planet-side.

"I'd heard you were an animal lover," The words were purred right behind him. Rather than leaving, the Cardassian now stood directly behind him, watching over his shoulder. He was so close that Will could practically feel the cold radiating from his body. Will shuddered. His whole body felt fuelled with rage. The idea of having a Cardassian so close to him created a mixture of fear and homicidal thoughts. He tried not to allow the memories of his torture surface. He didn't want to endanger his position here by letting them realise he was still more unstable than he'd managed to let on.

“I’m an entomologist, not a herpetologist,” Will turned as he spoke, growling the words as he grit his teeth. “I don’t want anything to do with Cardassians.” He’d only resisted saying *spoonheads* because he didn’t want to get reported and written up so soon after starting on the station.

Despite the slight smile still there, the Cardassian took a step back, raising his hands in placation. “My apologies. I was… unaware.”

Was it that obvious? Maybe the man knew exactly what someone tortured by his people looked like. Maybe to a Cardassian it was written all over his face.

“Fuck you,” Will snapped quietly, turning back to his work.

He practically held his breath until he heard the door slide shut, and then he let it out, trembling with rage. Why the fuck had they let a Cardassian stay on this station?

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Will tensed, feeling the eyes on him.

If this Cardassian *had* been a spy he'd either been very poor at it, or purposely wanted Will to know he was there without seeming like that was the case.

As it was, he felt the Cardassian's eyes follow him across the replimat as he gruffly ordered his raktajino.

The drink materialised and Will turned, finding - as expected - the Cardassian watching him. Will took a deep breath and huffed it out before starting back to the lab, having to pass his table on the way.

"Oh, Doctor. Do you have a moment?" The Cardassian stopped him as he walked past. "Would you join me for breakfast?"

Will tried to decide whether to reply in a firm negative or point out that he'd already been up for several hours and had had his breakfast in the lab around 6am. His final decision was to remain silent, giving a sneer as he started to walk away.

"Another time then," The Cardassian drawled in a soft tone.

Will stilled for a moment before continuing. Frozen briefly by the unexpected sensation he felt.

Unexpectedly, the Cardassian clearly found him *interesting*, in a rather unsettling way. More unsettling than for espionage reasons. And that was saying something.

Will shook it off and continued back to the lab.

*

Hann Lektor pulled out a bolt of fabric that might be too garish for some, but was of course perfect for his few Ferengi customers. He was partial to it himself but, perhaps decades of habit, he often dressed in muted tones. Pleasant lines and drab colours. Non-threatening and inconspicuous. Though he had to allow, he had softened his look since being stranded on the station. It wouldn't do to wear some of the near militaristic looks of his people on this station where to many he presented the face of the enemy.

A subtle manipulation easily achieved with the right fabric and cut. And without sacrificing too much of his personal aesthetic.

It did well to look the part. Who would buy clothes from a poorly dressed man.

He had gone so far as to study the station’s manifest, wanting to know the styles and body shapes he’d be working with. Tailoring for a Ferengi was a rather different affair than for a Klingon.

That was how he had first happened upon a name already familiar to him, in a professional capacity.

It was all the impetus that Hann needed to dig deeper into that name and look up everything there was to know on Will Graham the moment he learned of the man's presence on the station. He wasn't unknown, an empathic condition and once having been the prisoner of his people, he wasn't uninteresting to the Cardassians. And whilst Hann might now be disenfranchised, he was still Cardassian.

It had been a simple matter to find a way into the encrypted systems, patched into Gul Dukat's ship on his last visit. All too easy for someone who had helped create those encryptions. The file on Will Graham was small - a report of his capture on the frontline. The routine torture used on detainees. An evaluation of his empathic abilities and an order to turn over custody to the Obsidian Order.

Hann ruminated on the fact that they might have met then had Will Graham not been rescued, along with several other Federation prisoners.

Curiosity had him investigating the Federation networks. Will had been a bright young boy, unusually sensitive, and incredibly smart. His father had been in the Starfleet Corps of Engineers and his mother a botanist. They both died in a tragic accident when Will was ten years old, after which he passed into the foster system, where he thrived as well as could be expected after such a loss.

He studied until he gained a doctorate in entomology. He wrote the standard monograph on time of death by insect activity on several precontact planets that were being studied by xenoanthropologists.

He left these studies to join Starfleet as an non commissioned officer, reaching the rank of corporal in post as a science officer. But his ship was quickly called into the service of the colonies along the Federation-Cardassian border.

He saw several tours of the border before his ship was captured by the Cardassians.

After recuperating on Earth he clearly had been seeking a secluded post, having turned down teaching roles. And that brought the man's records to Deep Space Nine, the here and now.

An interesting fellow indeed, Hann had decided even before their first meeting. One that he had, of course, purposely orchestrated. It was no wonder the empath disliked him. His interest was no doubt palpable, and easily misconstrued as sinister to those with a poor opinion of Cardassians.

Perhaps a fair assessment, as first and foremost his interest, as in all things, was to see if he could use the human to his advantage, to return to Cardassia. Using information or perhaps the human himself as a bargaining chip.

But the truth was, as much as Hann would have liked to get inside Will Graham's mind for wholly different reasons a short few years ago, using the time honoured methods of the Obsidian Order, his interest was larger than that.

A lone Cardassian on a station full of people who loathed him, Hann longed for intelligent company. Someone of equal intellect that he could spar with. And everything he had learned told him he had met his match in Will Graham.

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"Hold the lift!" The Cardassian called out as he strode towards the turbolift to the upper pylons. If Will had been able to find the close button quickly enough, he would have used it.

As it was, the Cardassian 'tailor' slipped in next to him with a smile to charm snakes.

"Thank you," He said, courteously, a little incline of his head that almost felt like a bow.

Will grunted in return and stood in his little section of the lift.

"Evening stroll?"

Will looked over at the Cardassian, not in the least wanting to engage. He looked forward, not even glancing at Will.

"Something like that," Will replied gruffly, and the Cardassian let out a murmur of acknowledgement.

They had to be halfway up the pylon and it was already the most excruciating part of the day so far, and that was saying something.

With shudder the lift jarred to such a sudden stop that Will fell into the Cardassian and he had to help Will back to his feet.

"Power supply interrupted," The computer's soothing voice told them, as though it wasn't the worst possible thing that could have happened.

"Computer, why was the power supply interrupted?"

"Diagnostic complete."

Before she could continue the comm beeped and a slightly uncertain voice that Will recognised as the Chief of Operations cut in, "Hey, um. We'll have you out of there again soon. We have a few glitches we're still trying to work out. Damn Cardy tec-"

"We completely understand Chief," Lektor interrupted before O'Brien could say something terribly xenophobic and, as far as Will was concerned, deserved.

"How long Chief?" Will asked, it came out as a growl.

"I want to say minutes, but…"

"But?" Will asked.

"Could be a while. Until we know the cause of the power outage, we can't risk using the transporter. Don't want to lose power when you're half materialised."

"Understood," Will grunted his response.

"I'll get back to you as soon as I have an update."

The comm bleeped out and Will let out a heavy sigh, rubbing the bridge of his nose. All this because Morn had told him that it was a good spot to get some peace and quiet and a great view. He hadn't expected to share that with a damn lizard, much less get stranded on the way there.

Will felt a sudden shiver run over his skin. Discomfort, though not his own, it was impossible not to feel it in the confined space. The sensation was followed by a low noise from Lektor's throat. Maybe some call back to his ancestor's days in the swamps, a warning or alert.

"I'm a little claustrophobic, I'm usually fine. As long as I know I can escape." Lektor explained when he realised Will was watching him.

Will nodded.

"Yeah, I can feel it." Will said, meaning it to be dismissive. Why would he give a shit if a damn Cardassian didn't like confined spaces?

"You're empathic?"

"Almost. Not enough, but too much." Will replied just for the chance to be snarky.

Lektor looked at him expectantly, clearly wanting more information.

"We have the time, and… I will admit that I could do with a distraction." Lektor looked about the place, as though the small area crowded him.

Will frowned. He wasn't usually that bothered about being rude, but was very aware of the fact that race relationships on this station were important if the Bajorans were ever to lift themselves from the mire left by Cardassian occupation.

Will huffed, but spoke all the same. "My maternal grandmother was Betazoid. Mixed raced offspring tend to get varying levels of empathy rather than full telepathy. You know what happens when you have too much empathy and not enough at the same time?"

Lektor's lips quirked but he didn't reply. Will had heard of experiments the Tal Shiar had carried out on telepathic and empathic races, the sort they'd have carried out on him if he hadn't been rescued.

Lektor didn't respond, just looked at him expectantly, as though oblivious to the actions of the Tal Shiar. Will growled, "we're unstable, apparently."

Lektor raised a ridged brow, still saying nothing. But there was something in that look and in the feelings will could sense, that questioned how he got into Starfleet.

Will clenched his jaw.

He had lied to get into starfleet. He was smart enough to pass the assessments that looked for any Betazoid inheritance and adverse effects thereof. Genetics was one thing, but it had been easy to say there had been no physical effects of his heritage and have them unable to disprove him. Once he was in they never questioned his stability, his endurance of both prolonged space travel and enemy encounters. But it also meant they didn't have chance to protect him as the asset he might be in the wrong hands. Like the Obsidian Order or the Tal Shiar.

It also didn't give them chance to assume, as he knew had happened to many others in his situation, that he was just a high functioning sociopath.

Will was pretty sure that, if he wanted, Lektor could and possibly had already found this about him.

This seemed all the more so when Lektor finally said, "Your Federation is more prohibitive than they claim. Ask the Andorians if they feel equally treated. If Bajor feels that it will ever be equal to Vulcan."

Will huffed and he wasn't sure himself if it was in agreement or refute, though he said nothing further. As was evident from his new role, he retained something of a loyalty to the Federation regardless of everything that had come before.

*

Time was passing slowly and Hann found he didn't mind so much.

Will Graham was, in equal parts, becoming accustomed to his presence and set on edge by it.

After a few minutes silence Lektor ventured, "It… must have been difficult for you. Being a prisoner."

Will shot him a hard look. The anger clear in his expression, at the mention or memories or both.

"Your people are animals. I was…"

He trailed off but Hannibal nodded, he didn't need Will to admit he had been tortured. Of course he had. Such a specimen captured by the Cardassians? He was lucky that he was rescued before he could be handed over to the Obsidian Order. Not that he was so tactless as to point this out.

So instead Hannibal replied, "Not my people. Not anymore. When they withdrew from Bajor I was… surplus to requirements."

Will huffed and shook his head. "Being abandoned by your people doesn't make you any less one of them." Will replied tersely.

"Certainly, you are still one of your people. Though in a less volatile profession, I note." Lektor baited coolly.

"My people didn't abandon me!" Will near shouted, clearly starting to lose his cool.

"My dear boy, I never said they did."

Will eyes sparkled with hate and then… the doctor flushed, his cheeks starting to burn as he must have picked up on how much Lektor liked to see him flustered.

Before either of them could speak again the power flickered and then the turbolift suddenly began moving again. Surprise enough to both of them that they both stumbled, falling into each other.

A small consolation for the end of their time together.

Will balked at the chill of cold Cardassian skin against his own, reeling from a mixture of his own terrible memories at the sensation, and the unexpected thrill that went through Lektor.

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"No… No!" Will sat bolt upright in his bed, for a moment, unsure where he was. Only the softness of the mattress beneath him gave way that he was not still in Cardassian custody, as he had been dreaming.

"Computer, lights."

They came on at half levels automatically, so clearly it was still the middle of the night. The sheets were damp with his sweat and twisted around his body.

He fought to catch his breath and to suppress the sobs of anguish as his mind settled back into the here and now.

The nightmare had been strange. Usually it was nothing more than memories, the rehashing of torture he had been put through when in Cardassian custody. This time though, it hadn't been at the Cardassian detention centre, it had been on the station. Specifically in the tailor's shop. Though Hann Lektor wasn't there, or at least he felt that he wasn't. The two people torturing him had been faceless and hadn't spoken.

He was reminded of being trapped in a turbolift with the Cardassian a few hours earlier. He'd recognise his presence anywhere now. It had been overwhelming.

One of the reasons Will had childishly taken off at a run when the doors had opened. Trying to escape the tumult of emotions, some of which Will had been terrified were his own.

"Computer, time." Will asked as he started to extricate himself from his sheets.

"The time is 0309."

"Shit," Will muttered. He needed to be up at 0600 for work, and hoped that it had at least been after 0500.

He swung his legs around and off of the bed, sitting there and considering how to spend his time. There was no way he was getting back to sleep, and sitting around with nothing but his thoughts was only going to make the horrible feeling in his gut worse.

The dream had left him to discombobulated too read or even make lures, which was a relaxation hobby he'd had since childhood.

He needed a mindless distraction, and so his first thought was the holosuites at Quark's. He sighed and walked through to his living area, accessing his padd and looking up availability. Luckily at this time of day the holosuites were fairly quiet and only one of them was already booked out. So Will went ahead and booked an empty one, leaving himself enough time to shower and dress before his allotted time.

When he reached the holosuites, Will tried to access his *Mind Palace* holoprogramme, the only one he ever really used unless he was using the holosuite for some kind of training simulation. The programme was designed to be tailored to the user on set up and then added to over time.

Will's had remained static from the day he'd initiated it. A river in Maryland on Earth, where he'd spent some time as a kid. There was always a pile of fishing equipment there, a cooler of beers. A bottle of whiskey if he prefered. All set and ready for him just to wade out into the quiet of the stream.

But when he tried to call his programme up, the computer made an aggressive noise and informed him, "Programme is unavailable."

Will frowned, and tried again, thinking it must be a mistake, but the response was the same. He'd loaded it into Quark's database the first week they'd got up and running.

"Computer, why is the programme unavailable?" Will asked gruffly, expecting the response to be some sort of file corruption caused by the absolutely awful Cardassian tech that they were still struggling to integrate Federation systems with.

He was surprised when the computer responded, "Programme is already in use."

Will frowned.

He'd never seen the need to lock the programme. It wasn't one where you needed to save your progress, or something personal that you wouldn't want others to stumble across. So it had just seemed like a hassle to lock it down when there was no reason why anyone would even bother to use someone else's Mind Palace programme.

Or so he thought.

"Who is using the programme?" Will asked, curious as much as annoyed.

"It is currently in use in Holosuite Two, by Hann Lektor."

Will's blood ran cold and a shiver went up his spine. His first thought was to leave and find something else to do, avoid the Cardassian at all costs. But the part of him that had been left spoiling for a fight from his dream, won out and he stalked over to Holosuite Two and pressed for the doors to open.

They did. Lektor hadn't locked his session, and Will started to wonder if there was more to this.

The Cardassian was exerting an influence over him that he normally shrugged off. But after their encounter he had then dreamt about his capture. And now this? There was the feel of Cardassian manipulation at hand.

Manipulation he should avoid, he knew. But anger pushed him past that. As soon as he considered all the variables, and the lack of any reason he could see for Lektor to want to put them in another room together, Will knew this wasn’t paranoia. This was manipulation of a very superior sort.

He took a breath and walked forward, into the sunny day next to the river.

It was a strange thing, he realised, seeing it all so bright. He usually set the programme as perpetually just after dawn on a slightly overcast day. But this seemed to be the middle of a summer afternoon.

It took a moment for his eyes to adjust. He spotted, on the banks, his usual fishing gear and cooler. And for a moment, nothing seemed out of place. But then his eyes moved along the embankment, a little past the trees, where there was a clearing up to a rocky outcrop that protruded slightly over the stream.

And there, laying out on the rocky outcropping, under the hot sun was Hann Lektor in what appeared to be a pair of rather ornate pyjamas.

In the empty space of the artificial environment, with no real interference between them, Will was able to feel the man without really having to reach out. Will could feel an odd mix of apprehension and calm, that he could only attribute to someone meditating out of an anxiety or panic episode.

The emotions that filled the space between them made Will suddenly feel like an intruder. And once more he was caught between just walking away or confronting the lizard.

"You're welcome to join me, Doctor." Lektor rumbled without opening his eyes.

"You're in *my* programme," Will stated the obvious.

Lektor blinked his eyes open and then slowly sat, turning to look at him.

"Yes. I apologise, it was rude of me to do so without asking. I had something of an emergency and this seemed the best the computer could offer me." He looked out over the river, "It's very beautiful here."

Will huffed, "What the hell kind of an emergency requires a holosuite?"

Will wished he could take back the words as soon as he said them. Feeling at first a flash of anger at his response, and then something like an echo of feelings. A memory of anxiety. And then it was gone and Will realised that Lektor had effectively shut down his emotions.

The emotional whirlwind made his breath catch. Not least for how revealing it was.

Lektor's affected pleasantries hid a man who disdained rudeness. A man who was incredibly in control of his emotions and distressed when he wasn't, hence the anxiety over his claustrophobia. A man who had training enough to know how to block an empath, possibly a telepath too. Which could only mean he was, or had been, a member of the Obsidian Order.

Will felt a shudder go through him and every instinct told him to run. But then Lektor spoke, and there was something in his tone that appealed to Will to stay.

"Our episode in the turbolift. I'm afraid I was more affected by it than I believed. I needed a wide open space, the sun on my skin. And this was the closest I could get," He indicated the programme with a flourish of his hand.

Will took a few steps closer and heard the Cardassian sigh.

"*Closest*," He huffed, "As if I couldn't feel with every breath that it's nothing more than an illusion. That there's a holosuite wall not ten metres in front of us."

Will blinked, understanding that oppressive feeling intensely. He was right, it was better than nothing, but it still was very much not real.

"Nothing more than photons," Will agreed gruffly as he made his way up onto the outcropping.

"But it's the closest I will get." Lektor reiterated with a sigh, "Especially as the closest planet is somewhere I can't imagine I'd be welcome to spend a relaxing vacation." He ended with a light and dismissive chuckle.

"I can't say that I feel sorry for you," Will replied, unable to curb the venom in his words. "I can't imagine the survivor's of the Cardassian occupation are going to be that cut up about your fear of enclosed spaces."

Lektor chuckled again and shook his head. "Perhaps a good thing that you aren't a medical doctor.. Your bedside manner is significantly lacking."

Will huffed, a little amusement there.

After a short silence, Will mused, "You don't strike me as someone who much cares what others think of them. You could go planet-side and any inevitable insults would simply roll

off you like water off a duck's back."

Will hesitated a moment before taking a seat next to Lektor on the rock.

That caused a raised brow ridge, a quirk of a smile at the corner of his mouth. "Astute, but incorrect. I do care what *some* people think of me. Very few as that might be."

There was something meaningful in Lektor's tone that made heat crawl up Will's neck. Enough that Lektor's sharp, cold eyes narrowed in on it and a smile spread across his face.

"Does my interest make you uncomfortable?" He asked bluntly, unusually catching Will off guard.

He could usually read people easily, but with Lektor it was much harder. He hid himself so well and only revealed what he wanted others to see. Will wasn't sure if he should be flattered or not by the fact that he seemed to be allowing Will to see a considerable amount.

Will considered leaving. It felt like the correct thing to do. And part of him wanted to. But there was also a curiosity that he couldn't deny. And more than that. Part of him, as much as he hated to admit it, was starting to enjoy the verbal sparring with Lektor.

The few people that tolerated Will's naturally gruff and rude disposition were good people who often didn't appreciate his bluntness all the same. To find someone he could have this sort of back and forth with was a novelty for him. If only it had been anyone other than a Cardassian, Will mused, still torn.

Eventually he responded, “Uncomfortable? No. Curious, I suppose."

"As to why I'd be interested in a friendship with you?" Lektor surmised.

Will chuckled, shook his head and scratched at the stubble he'd neglected to shave before leaving his quarters. "Hardly. I expect I'm an Obsidian Order Operative's wet dream. A friendship with me? The things you could learn, the advantages you could take. And then one day I'd likely wake up back in some Cardassian cell with electrodes attached to my head so you can try and work out how to weaponise me."

Lektor chuckled and shook his head dismissively, "You have such a low opinion of my people."

"Perhaps, but that doesn't mean it isn't an accurate one." Will countered.

"Hmm," Lektor let out a soft murmur of agreement.

"You won't believe me, Will. But I will tell you anyway that perhaps with anyone else that might be true. But my exile is not a ruse. Indeed, there is no love lost between myself and the Cardassian Government. In fact, the Gul who oversees this region, Dukat, would gladly see me fed alive to hungry targs."

Will cocked a brow and let out an exasperated breath, "Even if I believed you have no connections or allegiances to the Cardassian Union, I don't believe you could claim that if the

right opportunity came up to return to their good graces, you'd turn it down. I don't plan on being that opportunity."

"Very sensible, of course. Though I do hope it doesn't affect the chances of us exploring a friendship."

Will gave an amused huff and got to his feet, brushing off the dust from the rock, fake as it was.

"Mr Lektor, I think it's safe to say that the light from friendship won't reach us for a million years. That's how far away from friendship we are."

Wanting to leave on the last word, Will turned on his heel and left the holosuite to the sound of soft chuckling behind him. Trying hard not to admit to the curiosity that had started to burn within him.

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Weeks had passed since their encounter in the holosuite, and Lektor had increasingly found ways to engage Will Graham in conversation.

It was clear, whether Will would admit it or not, that the light from friendship was indeed closer than claimed. But as time passed, the fleeting conversations were not nearly as stimulating for Lektor as he wished. He wanted to spend some real time with the man, and slowly, a plan had formed.

Hann knew there was one way that Will Graham would be unable to refuse him an audience. Something he'd gleaned from the hours spent in his Mind Palace. The option to include the company of a dog - a popular human pet - was telling. He hadn't indulged in this himself, but could instantly imagine many times that Will might have sat on that river bank with a beer in one hand and his other in soft and comforting fur. He might not be a vet, as he claimed, but Will Graham struck him as the solitary sort who would be an animal lover.

"Computer, please put me through to Doctor Graham," He purred as he stood looking out the window of his quarters. The view of the stars had changed since they moved the station to the mouth of the wormhole. A new view to study as he waited for a response.

He wasn't surprised when the reply came over the comm rather than via the small viewscreen in his quarters.

"What is it?" Came the gruff response, and Hann couldn't help the smile. After all, he need not have responded at all.

"I am sorry, I keep bothering you. But I really do need your assistance. You're the only person I can think of who might be able to help with this particular… problem." Hann grinned at the hesitation on the other end over his obvious suggestiveness of the wording.

"I'm really busy here, if you-" Will started.

"Please, I seem to have-" Hann stopped, interrupted as if perfectly on cue, by a small yip.

"Is that…" Will started, tone light before he cleared his throat and reestablished his gruff tone, "What is that?"

"I'm rather hoping you can tell me. I ordered a small shipment, a few cases of kanar for my own private larder, it is perfect to cook with you know? Many people see it only as a liquor but in the right sauce-"

"Lektor," Will cut in, "What was the noise?"

"When I was unpacking the cases I discovered what I thought to be a bundle of rags, which then attempted to bite me when I investigated."

This was partly true, though the creature appeared to be playing. And the story about the kanar was true. He just didn't plan on mentioning that the small bundle of fur now staring up at him adoringly from the floor, had been an expected part of the shipment too.

"Have you called the Quartermaster? You should report any irregularities and… damn, Lektor it could be full of diseases or anything."

"Oh," Hann replied with feigned naivety, "You're absolutely right of course, I should call them now. I do hope that they don't destroy the animal. It appears to be an infant I believe."

Hann crouched down in front of the pup, holding out a small piece of sausage he had cooked the evening before. The creature let out a low whine, begging.

"I… I'll be right there." Will replied and ended the communication.

Hann's mouth curved into a pleased grin, reaching out to pet his new accomplice.

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Will wasn't stupid.

He'd spent weeks trying to dodge the Cardassian and often unable to. It wasn't exactly seemly for a Starfleet Officer to tell a civilian to piss off in the middle of the replimat. In fact, Lektor was clearly engineering these situations where he could accost Will for a few minutes at a time, sometimes more, without Will being able to react negatively.

In the end he'd decided the only thing that could be done, was to take it to Sisko. But the Commander's response, beyond an amused raised brow and an indication that he was clearly not taking this seriously, was to tell him just to be very cautious around Lektor.

Despite Lektor's story this time, it was clear to Will that this was another manipulation. And he'd have stayed the hell away from it, if not for the involvement of some innocent, and as yet undetermined creature.

Once he located Lektor's quarters, he took a breath before pressing the chime.

He could hear the little barks of excitement even before the door opened, and tried to ignore the little skip of his heart at the noise. He missed having dogs.

The door opened to reveal Lektor with a concerned look as a small animal sat at his feet.

"I have fed it, but I'm not sure of the nutritional value of traditional Cardassian sausages."

"Lektor…" Will blinked at him, looking between the Cardassian and the creature, currently no bigger than a cat. "You have a targ puppy."

Lektor cocked a brow, "Is that so? Perhaps you're right, I should report it to the Quartermaster…"

"No," Will interjected. "I mean… um, yeah. You should do that. They can make sure it's disease free and let you know how you can, um… dispose of it." Will winced at his own words.

Lektor frowned, "Will they terminate it?"

"Only if it's diseased, otherwise I guess they'll find a home for it somewhere." Will said tentatively. “Ship it back off.”

It had bounded unsteadily over to Will and was sniffing at his pant legs with happy yips. "She seems to like you, perhaps you could give her a home."

"Um, no. I mean… I can't. Starfleet personnel aren't allowed. We don't have appropriate space in our quarters. Only civilians can have animals on board, and even then..."

"Oh," Lektor replied, doing an almost convincing job of looking thoughtful. Will was completely certain that Lektor was deliberately not hiding his lack of naivety. "I admit to knowing nothing of pets. But perhaps with assistance from an expert…" Lektor led.

Will rolled his eyes and shook his head, giving Lektor a weary look, "Really?"

"What?" The Cardassian replied in faux innocence, "I feel responsible for the creature now. Don't you? The poor little mite."

"She's a targ, Lektor." Will grumbled, "She is going to end up almost as big as your couch." Will looked down at the small, adorable bundle.

"Not a good house pet?" Lektor asked and Will looked back up at him, pretty sure he already knew the answer to that, but needed to get past Will's opposition.

"No, they're fine. For their size they surprisingly don't need much exercise, they do okay in confined spaces. Used to be popular for Klingon captains to keep one on ship as a pet.”

"I thought you weren't a vet." Lektor purred.

Will sighed, "You were right about me being an animal lover."

"Wonderful," Lektor clapped his hands together. "Well, I shall keep her here and I'm sure you'll be happy to assist."

With a smile Lektor walked over and scooped the targ puppy up from where she sat at Will's feet.

"I think I'll call her Abigail," Lektor said before depositing her into Will's arms.

Will let out a heavy sigh but cooed over her all the same. "An earth name?"

"On the contrary, it's Cardassian. Or, it is if the universal translator didn't morph it enough to be easier on your ears."

Will nodded and moved to the window, looking out over the stars with the pup in his arms. Showing her the universe before her.

"Yes, I'll help you with her." Will sighed out the words, finally voicing his acceptance of the situation. He knew he was being manipulated, but with an innocent little life now in the middle of it, what else could he do?

Part of him, part that he didn't want to acknowledge, was a little glad at having the choice taken from him. Of having the excuse.

"Thank you, Will." Lektor said sincerely.

Will cleared his throat, “It might not be that simple, though. Targs can be aggressive. Klingons often use them for hunting. You need to talk to Jack Crawford, the quartermaster, and if he thinks she’s a killer…”

Will looked down to the bundle of fluff in his arms. “If he decides she’s been bred for hunting…”

“If she had been, she’s not a hunter now, she’s here with us now. Abigail is no more a killer than you are for the lives you took whilst fighting in the Border Wars, or the lives *I* also took at war.”

“It’s not our place to decide.” Will growled back, not just because that was the truth of it, but because there was too much truth. Will didn’t want to think about the Cardassians he had killed, no more than he wanted to think about who Lektor might have killed. And not because he regretted it. No, it was war and… even if it hadn’t been...

“If not ours, then who's? Who knows Abigail better than you and I? Or the burden she bears? The reputation that is to precede her just because of her heritage? No, Will. We must protect her.” Lektor insisted, cool and calm.

Will felt Lektor step close to him, just at his back. And then Hann Lektor rested a hand on his shoulder, giving it a barely perceptible squeeze.

"We are her fathers now."

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Enemies to tolerating, tolerating to friends, friends to lovers...

"It’s quite unpronounceable to humans, but were I to attempt a true translation, beyond the universal translator, then Hannibal would be the closest human name." Hann mused as he and Will sat beside each other on the river bank of Will's Mind Palace. A sunny and bright day, as Hann preferred, and Will was happy to wordlessly oblige.

Will scoffed, "Like the Roman General. Of course."

Lektor knew that the attitude was a fond annoyance at what Will saw as Lektor's pompousness, rather than disdain as it once had been. In fact it had been quite some time since he had the sense from Will that there was something darker and angrier under his skin, aimed directly at him. But he knew better than to mention it.

Will's warming towards him was best unspoken by either of them, lest it be dissected too closely. This way they could live in comfortable denial.

"A General? I like him already. Powerful man?" Hann asked with a grin. “Ordinarily, I don’t trust coincidences. Oh, I believe in them, coincidences happen every day. But they shouldn’t be trusted. I will make the exception on this, because it can only be fate, rather than mere coincidence, that I am a power General on your world.”

Will rolled his eyes and pulled Abigail into his lap, despite the fact that the targ, having grown quite substantially over the last seven months, was almost of a size with him. It was just the easiest way to try and hide the amused chuckle that Hann’s ridiculousness pulled from him, though completely unsuccessful. Hann enjoyed the reaction with great fondness.

They lapsed into silence then, Will’s hands idly stroking the targ’s fur, seeming lost in thought.

"They… scrambled the universal communicator when I was imprisoned. Cardăsda is… an aggressive language." Will said quietly, and Lektor reveled in yet another occasion since they had started to raise Abigail, that Will had volunteered snippets of personal information. This wasn’t even the first time that he had casually, if hesitantly, mentioned his time with the Cardassians.

"Isn't it?" Hann agreed, knowing better than to push for more. "I've always thought so too. When you leave the homeworld and really start to experience other languages. There is, I find, a certain melody to human languages. They have a pleasingly round sound."

"Mmm" Will agreed and scratched between Abigail's ears.

She was growing into an ugly beast, with more teeth than seemed to fit in her head, but Hann had to admit to finding her strangely beautiful. A face only a father could love, perhaps? And the fact that she connected him to Will, endeared him all the more.

Will was more than a pet project now.

There had always been, at the back of his mind, the ways in which he could use Will Graham to his advantage, to his own ends. But that had most certainly changed, or perhaps it was more accurate to say, that those ends had changed.

Yes, Will Graham might have made an interesting study, to himself and then maybe later the Obsidian Order, or perhaps even the Tal Shiar - whoever might strike the best deal. But more and more, as Hann was sure he had suspected could be the case from very early in their acquaintance, the reward for gleaming more about Will, was a personal one in and of itself.

For the first time in his life, Hann Lektor found that he was getting to know someone with absolutely no ulterior motive, at least from now and for now. His father had raised him well in that respect, and would likely be disappointed in his lack of desire to use Will Graham in any way - necessary or otherwise.

"What would my name be then?" Will broke through his thoughts with the random question. One that made Hann's chest swell, so rare was it for Will to take a casual interest back in something of such little consequence that it could only further their friendship and nothing else.

"In Cardassian? It's tricky. There isn't a direct translation that wouldn't be the word *will*, will power, the will of the prophets, that sort of usage. Names aren't an easily translated thing, unlike into Bajoran for example, where they have several popular names that would easily substitute for popular Earth names and so-" Hann paused, taking in Will's cocked brow. The one he received when he tended to chatter on about something Will wasn't really interested in hearing about so completely. He cleared his throat, "If I had to find an equivalent name in Cardăsda, it would perhaps be, Glik."

They were both quiet and Hann wondered if he had bored Will. But then the human spoke softly.

"That isn't what they called me in the cells." Will replied, and then looked away, as though he hadn't intended to let the words out.

"No?" Hann asked, for it did, on this occasion, feel like Will wanted him to ask. Wanted to speak of this subject that they had skirted around so many times before and often with much more venom.

Will continued to look out from the outcropping and over the fast flowing stream. "It was Duxnor."

"Oh." Hann's blood ran cold and he stilled. "Duxt Nor. It means… It is a derogatory term for a… a male prostitute."

He watched Will's jaw clench and he Hann found himself suddenly filled with the desire to track down any Cardassian that had laid hands on Will and tear them limb from limb.

But then Will let out a pent up breath and relaxed a little into Abigail.

"I wondered. I suspected."

It took everything in him for Hann not to ask what had happened, if they had touched him. If they had… He found he couldn't bear the thought. Which seemed so strange, even to him, given that he had killed people with his bare hands and, on occasion, even mutilated them.

But there was a line he had never crossed and never would. The thought that someone might have with Will, made his blood run ice cold.

"It's what they called me when I first arrived. They laughed about it, and pinched my cheeks, ruffled my hair, Pushed me around between them. And then one night, my third night there, I could hear them all laughing outside, egging each other on. One of them came into my cell and put his hands on me. Tried to take off my clothes. I fought back. It was before they starved the strength out of me. I was able to pin him, no weapons but my hands and teeth…" Will trailed off at the memory.

"They… They didn't bother me again. Still called me *that* word, but they spat it with disdain. I didn't sleep, even when they let me," Will huffed a laugh, a near hysterical one, no doubt at the memory of the torture he had endured. "I was scared I'd wake up with one of them trying to…"

Lektor cleared his throat. He needed to in order to unclench his jaw and speak through the anger that he didn't want to display and hoped he was hiding well from Will.

"They wouldn't have tried again. They expected to break you and have you submit to them. You see, Will, Cardassians such as that, such as our friend Dukat for example, like to imagine their victims in love with them. They give them no choice but to give themselves freely and make believe they enjoy it. It was something many of them enjoyed so much about the Bajorans. Much more malleable in such a way after so many years of endless subjugation."

"Fuck," Will replied an shook his head. "Fucking monsters."

"Yes, quite." Lektor agreed.

Will eyed him then, and it wasn't a kind look. As he knew well it wouldn't be. There was no way they could ever converse, no matter how directly or indirectly, about Will's experiences of Cardassians, without him directing some of the blame to Hann. He knew the mind well enough, had studied it at length, which had of course allowed him to advance as far as he had in the Obsidian Order. He knew how to break one, and he knew when one had been broken. Will's certainly had. He was mending it, slowly but surely, but all the same he had been

broken by Hann's own people, and Will would always imbue some responsibility for that in him.

"You are one." Will spat the words, his hands clenching in Abigail's fur. Not enough to hurt, but enough to wake her. She raised her head in curiosity and Will pet her gently.

"Perhaps." Hann agreed, "Perhaps not. I am a Cardassian by birth, obviously. The only one of us left on this station as a matter of fact."

Will gave him an expression he had become quite fond of, a withering look often accompanied by an eye roll. At least between the words and Abigail's reassuring presence, Will seemed to be moving away from his anger. Righteous as it was.

"As you know, I do appreciate making new friends where I can." Hann let a slight smile play across his lips. "I was abandoned by my people, enough that anyone might question my loyalty to them."

"Oh," Will huffed, "I have no doubt that you have no loyalty to them. As with all Cardassians, your loyalty is only to yourself. So I have even less doubt that you will use anyone or anything as and where you can if it gets you something you want. Including an end to your exile."

"Such a low opinion of me," Hann chortled but knew it was useless to refute it. Not least because it wasn't entirely untrue. Though Will Graham had long since been removed from his list of people he might use in such a manner, it wasn't something Lektor thought he should admit aloud.

And it was a pity to abandon any thoughts of using Will, given that he was his best chance thus far to end his exile. Unfortunately, his compassion for Will Graham had long since become rather inconvenient.

Will huffed, "Before, I have felt that you think that. That you are separate, perhaps even above other Cardassains. But opinion and truth are not the same thing. You can't not be a Cardassian any more than Abigail can't not be a targ."

"Mmm," Hummed contemplating. He knew from Will's tone that he was done talking on the subject. In fact the man then reclined back onto the outcrop and closed his eyes, not having been offended enough to leave - on this occasion - but not wishing to speak more at that time.

Hann let out a sigh, and didn't plan for one moment not to be allowed the last word in this case. Because, Will really should know better by now.

"If you felt, my dear Will, that it was impossible for someone to change their nature, then when we reported Abigail's existence to Jack Crawford and Captain Sisko why did you fight so hard to convince them that our care would ensure her disposition would not turn blood thirsty?"

He let out a gentle sigh and watched Will go rigid at the words before laying down beside him on the rock and letting the sun warm him.

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Initially, when Lektor had told Will that he had to make a rare trip off station for a few days in order to select some rare fabrics that the replicator could not do justice of, he had thought little of it.

Well, he'd thought it a ruse. Will was sure that Lektor would return with appropriate numbers of bolts of fabric as cover enough for whatever nefarious thing he was doing. There was likely a parallel deal happening, not in goods but in something Lektor prized much more highly - information.

It was only as he walked to the civilian quarters on the habitat ring, off to collect Abigail and take her to the holosuite for exercise, that the reality of Lektor's absence hit him.

He input the security code Lektor had given him and let himself into the quiet quarters. The targ's bed and toys had a neat little area in the main living quarters and Abi looked up at him with bright eyes, excited to see him.

Will wasn't surprised to see the quarters seemed in no other way secured, all doors open and welcoming. Lektor kept his secrets well, the most thorough thief could gain access to the Cardassian's quarters and never find the slightest trace of anything more than what Lektor wished them to see. So Will didn't read anything into this apparent trust.

But he had to admit he had come to enjoy spending time in these quarters.

They were better appointed than his own, a little more homely though Lektor was rather spartan in his decorations. It was the opposite of Will's quarters in a way. His were full of trinkets and little gifts he'd received over the years. Several physical books that were well read by him and the other hands they'd passed through since their making. He kept much of it out of habit, feeling that he should have an attachment to these things, even though he found he didn't. The sparseness of Lektor's quarters much better suited him than the meaningless clutter of his own.

Will had always tried to convince himself that the combination of sparsity and the presence of Abigail were the sole source of his enjoyment.

But the quarters seemed eerily quiet without Lektor.

He'd only been gone twelve hours, but even the way Abi looked at him spoke of loss he wasn't prepared for.

She didn't rise, though she made some friendly snuffling noises, a small yip much like the sounds she made as a puppy, to show she was pleased to see him. Will walked over and crouched next to her.

"Hey girl, you lonely? Miss your master?" He asked her as he scratched her head.

It was strange to think of how these two might be when Will wasn't there. He only really knew their dynamic together, walking her together. Taking her to the holosuite, where she

would make herself comfortable on Will, as she always had as a pup, without a care for how she was very much larger than that now.

He wondered what they did when he wasn't around. Lektor didn't seem like a natural pet owner, and yet, targs didn't shed like many earth animals. And they were fiercely loyal. It seemed like a good match if he were to have any pet.

Did he sit there in the evenings reading with Abi curled up at his feet?

Will expected the image that conjured to make him chuckle with the absurdity. But it didn't. Instead he found a hollow ache overcome him.

Will clenched his jaw and started to harness Abi, before letting them out of the quarters and heading to the holosuite. Resolutely not thinking about the feeling that had settled in his chest. The one that made clear that *he* missed Lektor.

He managed to ignore the thoughts by grabbing his gear and wading out to fish whilst Abi ran up and down the bank before bounding up to the usual outcropping the three of them liked.

Well, Lektor liked it. It caught the sun, and Cardassians loved little more than intense sunshine. Will could take or leave it. Or he would have said so in the past. But he'd found himself starting to enjoy laying there in the warmth.

He cast the line and looked up at the targ settling on the rock and giving him a forlorn glance.

With a sigh, Will had waded back in after an hour and joined Abi on the rock.

He lay back in the sun and let her settle against him. But it wasn't as nice as usual. Not as enjoyable. In fact it was hard to remember what was enjoyable about lazing in the sun. Hell, before Lektor had started to come into his Mind Palace, Will kept the simulation at that of a slightly overcast and cool morning.

It was refreshing and grounding. And… not this. This was something else. Something that had weirdly become pleasurable and now just felt lonely.

Will huffed out a breath and buried a hand in Abi's fur, feeling her snuffling under his fingers. A comfort, but oddly not enough.

"I guess you really do miss him, huh?" Will said softly to Abigail, ignoring the gnawing ache inside.

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Will arrived at their booked table and took a seat, Lektor already sat there waiting, looking up to him with such a warm smile that it made Will's chest tighten.

The new Andorian restaurant had received quite the rave reviews and it had come up more than once in casual conversation a couple of the times they had walked Abi together in the holosuite. It had seemed like a great idea to meet there and catch up.

“Hannibal,” Will teased by way of a greeting, as he made himself comfortable.

Lektor let out an amused hum, a fond and conspiratorial smile passing across his face. Will found he enjoyed that. That there was something of an inside joke between them.

Even so, Will went quiet then, other than to order a drink. The use of the Earth version of the Cardassian’s name had reminded him of something that had made his stomach flip when he’d read it. They looked over their menus in near silence, Will only answering the polite questions about his trip, as he tried to decide whether to say something more. Admittedly, a little concerned where the conversation might lead if he did.

They ordered the food and then sat with nothing more to occupy them than each other.

“There’s something bothering you, Will.” Lektor noted, and there was concern there.

Perhaps if there hadn’t been, Will would have said nothing, but instead he took a breath and replied, “I looked up Glik. In the station’s old Cardassian databases, on a hunch that it wasn’t just a name you’d plucked from thin air.”

“A little detective work?” Lektor was amused.

“Curiosity.” Will confirmed, trying to ignore the way his heart thumped in his chest.

“Don’t you say on earth that such a thing kills carnivorous quadrupeds?” Lektor grinned and Will rolled his eyes, shaking his head.

Now that he had started, he was determined to not let himself get distracted. Will continued. “If I’m honest I was expecting there might be some historical figure with the name. Perhaps a famous clown, or something equally menacing.”

“Cardassia does not have *clowns*” Lektor replied coolly, the slightest twitch of amusement playing across his lips. Something that Will only noticed because, he realised, he’d started to linger on those lips a little too long at times.

Their drinks arrived and Will cleared his throat, “Glik was a famous philosopher, before Cardassia became a feudal society. He wrote extensively on the nature of love, of attraction on a soul level. Like Plato, on Earth.”

Lektor smirked, “You think I compare you to Plato?”

“I think you meant something by it.” Will picked up his drink, taking a sip of it before observing Lektor over the rim. “Everything you say and do has an underlying message that will be exposed as and when you want it to be.”

Lektor’s mouth twitched in another smile and Will knew he had taken the words as a compliment.

Lektor distracted himself with his napkin, folding it neatly into his lap. “You credit me with a little too much forethought.”

Will huffed, “Really? Is that modesty? I think it’s a lie, Mister Lektor. Don’t think that I don’t know you well enough by now to know how you use truth and lies to your advantage.” Will had to stifle a grin of his own. This sort of banter between them was exactly what he had missed whilst they had been parted.

“On the contrary, I never tell the truth because I don't believe there is such a thing. Truth, Doctor, is in the eye of the beholder.” There was a note of teasing there, but Will knew there was, ironically, a seed of truth in it.

“Is that a lie or the truth?” He pushed, amused but also enjoying the way Lektor completely kept his cool. He would never be trapped in either a lie or the truth.

“Oh, I wouldn’t like to say.” Lektor dismissed, playfully.

Will chuckled and shook his head. “Out of all the stories you told me, which ones were true and which ones weren't?”

“My dear Doctor, they're all true.”

“Even the lies?”

“Especially the lies.” Lektor’s face broke into a grin that should have been menacing, but actually made Will’s heart pound for altogether other reasons.

Will’s face hurt from the involuntary grin and he shook in a silent chuckle. Lektor smiled across at him and he was struck with a thought that this amusement was rooted in who Lektor was, as a man and as part of his species. Their jokes, this amusement, was directly related to his species.

And Will should hate that. Like he hated all Cardassians.

"What is it, Will?" Lektor asked from across the table.

Will hadn’t realised how pensive he’d become until those words had drawn him from the very sudden funk.

He should hate Lektor. He should abhor everything about him, and yet they were sat opposite each other on what seemed, suspiciously, like a date.

Will wasn’t even sure how he had agreed to this. They’d never done anything like this before, at most he’d passed Lektor in the replimat and felt that, given their now common interest in Abigail, he could hardly say no when asked to take a seat and share a beverage.

So yes, they’d had lunches together. Sometimes morning coffee. But never a prearranged occasion such as this.

Initially, when Lektor had returned from his trip and suggested they catch up and he check that Abigail had been alright, Will had assumed he’d just drop by Hann’s quarters. But when the Cardassian had suggested meeting at the new restaurant, it had caught Will so off guard that he didn’t even think to say no. Couldn’t quite find the words for it.

Didn’t want to say no.

And now they were sitting there, and all that was missing was a damn candle.

Will shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

Cleared his throat and shifted some more.

There was an amused flicker across Lektor’s face. And for some reason, that annoyed Will. As did the ache in his chest that was almost as painful as the bitterness that burned in him as well.

He’d been having a good time. Like so many other times they’d spent together. He’d been enjoying this and Lektor’s company. And the thought of that made him angry. Because he shouldn’t. He should hate it.

He should hate Lektor.

“We’re not friends,” Will spat the words. Which seemed to amuse Lektor all the more, and he glanced around them as though to indicate to Will that their current situation said something else. It was clear the Cardassian thought this was yet more teasing between them.

"What is friendship?" Lektor asked thoughtfully, though Will was sure he wasn't required to answer. "Is it friendship? I've always affirmed that I'm here should you like to converse. Or simply wish, as I do, for a bit of enjoyable company now and then, I’m at your disposal. These are merely conversations.” Lektor spoke casually, watching Will over his own glass as he lifted it to his lips.

Will huffed, looking down at his own drink and lifting it to take a few gulps.

It still felt like a damn date, and it felt like Lektor was trying to manoeuvre this into something.

“This isn’t… more. You know that, right? You understand that?” Will asked gruffly. He wagged his finger between them, “This thing between you and me, it’s just casual. No, less than that it’s… a mutual, um, meeting of minds and enjoying each other’s company.”

“That sounds like a friendship to me, Doctor.” Lektor chuckled.

Will’s face went red, and only partly in anger, though he didn’t plan to admit it. “No. It definitely isn’t.” Will growled, wanting to push it further to say that it never would be. And it wouldn’t be more than friendship either no matter how much Will actually did enjoy his company.

Lektor smiled that infuriating smile, the one that made him look more reptilian than usual, as he pleasantly rejoined, “Of course, whatever you say, Doctor.” Lektor set his glass back down with a thoughtful hum, "That said, Will. I think you'll find that the relationship that has developed between us, is exactly what you humans would define as a friendship"

"Not what you Carassians would though," Will picked up and that earned him a snake-like charming smile.

"For Cardassians friendship is much more complex and politically charged. It is a case of, as you humans say, keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

The words struck Will for a moment. When he had first learned of Lektor's presence on the station, he had automatically considered him - as all Cardassians - an enemy. Given his personal experiences, Will had no compunction over his xenophobia with Cardassians.

"Do you consider me an enemy, Lektor?" Will asked carefully, eyeing Lektor's amused grin.

"No, dear Will. I consider you interesting."

Will wasn't sure if it was the man's intense gaze or the words that made sweat prickle over the back of his neck.

Lektor pushed, "Would it be so difficult for you to admit that we have become friendly?"

Will grit his teeth. It was an undeniable truth that ha didn't want to sit comfortably with him,

A sudden sense of fondness overwhelmed him and Will looked at Lektor to see a soft and only slightly devious smile there as the Cardassian let down the mental guard that he now clearly kept in place around Will.

It only just then struck Will how exhausting that must be for him. Surely, the Obsidian Order had intended their operatives to employ it during interrogations. And for some time, he'd considered that Lektor's only motivation in this was to shield his secrets and lies, though he knew Will's empathy didn't work quite that way.

It was only in that moment that Will realised it was done for his own comfort. Lektor understood that Will didn't wish to be overwhelmed by someone else's emotions, and Lektor had done what he could in that regard.

“What you’re asking for is a pact to ignore the worst in one another in order to continue enjoying the best. I’m not sure that’s something I can do.”

With those words and the way the Cardassians emotions sank into his own skin, or so it felt, Will had a flash of a memory. Perhaps it was his inner turmoil, this confusion. He felt so torn over not hating the man in front of him.

The flash of memory was of a trauma. Though not his.

He took a sharp breath, and gripped the table. It had been so long since his PTSD had been so heightened that he’d had a flashback, that he was only briefly aware that was what it was before he was thrown into the memory with no paddle to guide him.

He was back in the interrogation centre, he could smell it. The cold, metallic scent of the place. Of hard walls and blood. He remembered keenly the sick exhilaration he felt at the fear pulsing through the Cardassian that was too young for war. He’d already given up, already

tried to extricate himself from Will, when he sank his teeth into the boy’s neck ridges and pulled back with a chunk of flesh.

They had made a monster of him, and he'd enjoyed it.

The boy's scream rang in his ears, slowly replaced by his name. Softly spoken, a hand on his own.

"Will?"

Lektor's voice grounded him and the vision from his past began to fade.

He drew his hand back from the table, from Lektor's touch.

"What were you remembering, Will? I know that look." There was something like concern in Lektor's voice.

Will resisted the urge to growl that he bet Lektor knew very well what trauma looked like, but when he looked up he saw the honest concern in his eyes.

And that was worse than anything he was sure the Cardassian had felt for him before. A sign that he might actually care for Will was more unsettling than the little teases, and the manipulations he perhaps thought Will didn't see.

"I have to go," Will said abruptly, standing and placing his napkin on the table.

He said no more than that, walking from the restaurant as several other patrons stared after him. Lektor made no move to make a scene and Will was glad of that.

Because he couldn't cope with that right now. Especially if it pushed him to acknowledge the truth, a truth he didn't want to be true. Because then maybe he really was a monster after all, if he was developing feelings for a monster.

*

Hann felt no animosity towards Will for what had happened at the restaurant. Nor for the fact that he had been clearly avoiding him since. But when it looked for a moment like Will was going to pass him in the replimat despite Hann having waved out to him, that he would have to consider rude.

He had given him space, he had been understanding. And he was sure that the root of Will's distress was in having to deal with the feelings they clearly had for each other.

Their friendship.

Their partnership, when it came to Abigail.

It was never easy to accept feelings you might have for someone you considered, on some level, an enemy.

"Will, would you care to join me?" Hann said loud enough for the surrounding tables to hear, and that, as he knew it would, stopped Will in his tracks. Will was not one to much care what people thought of him, and even if they thought him rude - which he often was. But, with eyes on him after the episode at the restaurant and the subsequent rumours that it had been a lovers tiff - which Hann might have encouraged - Will had a quandary.

Hann could see it in his face, the processing. The working out, the decision making of what he should do. Not least because it had now been almost three weeks since the restaurant and he hadn't even been by to see Abigail.

The struggle was clear, but the outcome Hann was unable to predict. He simply had to wait.

Until finally, Will took a seat at his table.

"It's good to see you," Hann told him, quite sincerely.

Will didn't respond to that directly, didn't even look at Hann, simply replied to the table, "How is Abigail?"

"She's well, regarding her health. Though she misses you." Hann put it bluntly, knowing Will would not respond by using it to make him feel guilty. Using Abigail to get to Will, was something that needed to be delicately done.

He resisted the urge to add that he too had missed Will. Whilst true, it would do him no good to say it at this juncture.

"I miss her too," Will replied. He clasped his hands in front of him on the table, staring at them intently. Apparently bracing himself for what he wanted to say.

"It's difficult for me to keep company with a Cardassian." Will finally pushed out the words, glancing up briefly before back to his hands.

"I can't change my race and heritage any more than you can yours," Hann pointed out gently. "But, I understand Will. And I hope you will-"

Will cut him off then, interrupting, perhaps before he lost the nerve to say anything further.

“I like… talking to someone that…” Will started and Hann let a small grin creep over his face at the words too rude for the human to admit, that there were no others on this station that were their equal.

“You like to converse with someone of equal intellect. No one can blame you for that.” Hann purred, enjoying the way Will’s cheeks flushed slightly and he glanced quickly around to see if anyone had heard him.

Not needing the affirmation, Hann continued, “I will admit, that was the reason I so wished to make your acquaintance. Things can get quickly stale around here without ample stimulation.”

As the blush spread to the tips of Will’s ears, Hann couldn’t help the adoring look he knew he was giving the human. In Will’s expression there was anger, as well as embarrassment. Will was not fond of being teased, it would seem.

Which felt like all the more reason to do so.

"Why are you like this?" Will grumbled.

And in that moment, Hann knew that despite his protests, Will wasn't as averse to these attentions as much as he might wish to be.

"What would you like me to be like?" Hann asked quietly, leading and smooth.

Will let out a shuddering breath and looked at him.

"Like someone who isn't my enemy."

The moment of silence between them was clearly enough for Will to decide it was the end of the conversation. A little less abruptly than in the Andorian restaurant, Will stood and inclined his head before turning on his heel and leaving.

*

The weather in the Eastern Province was temperate in a way that reminded Will of his Mind Palace programme.

"You seem pensive," Came the soft, almost melodic words of Berna Donae, the vedek that was acting as Will's guide through the sacred gardens. He had been helping Will over the few days of the research trip and they had been in contact for a few months before then to discuss the trip and the rare species of insect that had been previously believed eradicated during the occupation. They required the use of Federation equipment and expertise, as their own had been depleted in the occupation. Will had of course, been only happy to help.

Will pulled on a smile and shrugged, "Just thinking. About bugs."

The vedek, raised a brow, clear disbelief though he said nothing.

Will wouldn't have called them friends, but certainly friendly colleagues. The vedek, before finding religion at the end of the occupation, had at one time studied biology and ecosystems as much as he could under the Cardassians. All the same, he and Will had enough in common that it had allowed them to certainly warm to each other since Will arrived.

Developing this new friendship was strangely enjoyable, though occasionally Will had to distance himself from the vedek. The man was often haunted by dreams of past violent encounters with the Cardassians and his own ptsd. So much so, that after the first night of triggering his own flashbacks and panic attacks, he had to request to be moved to a room in a different part of the monastery that adjoined the gardens.

During the day, when the vedek's mind was at peace and meditative, Will enjoyed his company greatly. Allowing the calming effect to wash over him, and wondering if he should

talk to Commander Sisko about spending more time planetside for his studies.

With only one day left to his trip, and more than enough samples collected of both the bug and its immediate environment, Will should have been ready to go.

But he found himself hesitating. He found Lektor coming to mind.

There was something in this friendship he was forming with the vedek that made him ache. Because it wasn't like what he had been forming with Lektor. The feeling of it was so entirely different that it left Will in turmoil.

"I am pensive." Will suddenly admitted as Donae was about to head back towards the monastery.

"Is it something I can help or guide you on?" He asked, folding his hands together and waiting patiently.

"I'm not um, one of your, um, flock." Will winced at the words, not sure quite how to explain that he didn't want to waste the vedek's time.

Donae smiled softly, "The fact that you are not Bajoran doesn't mean I can't see the healing your pagh requires."

Will swallowed and nodded. The vedek already knew, in brief, why Will had had to change rooms. Perhaps he thought that what was making Will pensive was related to his trauma, and perhaps it was really. Certainly the emotions coming from the vedek were nothing more than a pure desire to help someone in need.

"I have… Someone in my life who is… I think I should stay away from him." Will didn't add that he couldn't as much as he tried, despite all reason.

The vedek cocked his head in question, "A colleague? A friend? A lover?"

Will hesitated over that last word. A brief though, fleeting through his mind. Would Lektor's lips be cold to the touch?

Will took a deep breath and finally replied, "None. He wants to be my friend. We, somehow, we managed to adopt a targ together."

"You don't wish to be his friend?" The confusion there, Will could sense, was put on. Trying to lead Will out all the more. And it worked.

"I… want him in my life."

"That admission took a great deal of effort, Will." Donae responded gently, "What is it that makes you hesitate? Is it something he has said or done, or something you fear he might? Or might not?"

"It's…" Will considered his answer, one that had seemed so firm until the moment he was about to say it and realised it would have been untrue. "It's nothing he's done, personally.

It's… He's a Cardassian."

Will watched the vedek carefully, not wanting to upset him or bring back the memories that visited him at night.

"Ah," Donae answered with a smile and a nod. "I see."

The vedek began to walk and Will fell into step beside him, leaving his equipment next to the shrubbery. It took a moment for him to acclimatise in his direction and realise they weren't heading to the monastery but to the centre of the gardens. Towards the meditation pool.

"You will judge him on the actions of his species?" Donae asked, words so very soft, taking away any anger that Will had been tempted to infuse into his response.

"No, I… Well, yes. But also, he was, I'm pretty sure he was an Obsidian Order operative. He might still be a spy."

"Ah, yes. Mister Lektor," Donae replied with a nod and a smile. "The station's resident Cardassian." The vedek took in a breath, clearly considering as they continued their way to the pool, reaching the edge of the manicured lawn it sat in the centre of.

Finally Donae let out his breath.

"We are all different in war. And whilst it is harder to excuse the aggressors in such things, we must also remember that to be able to forgive ourselves we must be able to forgive our enemies. And we all require that forgiveness."

They walked silently to the pool and then Donae motioned towards one of the beautifully carved stone benches next to the water. They sat gazing into the water.

"During the occupation, Will, I murdered people. And yes, perhaps we can find justifications given the circumstances. But it is their faces I see in my nightmares not those of my torturers. Every day I struggle for forgiveness. Those soldiers may have been soldiers, but they were also someone's son, someone's daughter. Forgiveness doesn't come easy when you took joy in it, even if that joy was because you were able to live another day"

Will felt a lump rise in his throat. The feeling of compassion and understanding came off of the vedek in waves.

Even so, he had to disagree, “It’s not the same. You were fighting for your life. You killed to stay alive. You killed because they attacked you first.”

Donae shook his head. “Not always. I helped plan and excute several bombings of their mess halls whilst they sat unawares and died whilst supping. Even one attack on a Gul’s residence that killed many innocent members of his family.”

“But they wouldn’t have been here to be killed if they hadn’t occupied your planet.” Will raised his voice, but then quietened a little as he continued. “If they weren’t… monsters.”

Donae smiled gently, “We’re all monsters, Will. They killed us, we killed them, somewhere in another universe perhaps there is an Empire rather than a Federation. If you speak with some of my flock, they will tell you there is no difference. That we have welcomed the Federation in the place of the Cardassians. But… you don’t think that’s true, do you?”

Donae’s smile was teasing.

“The Federation aren’t the Cardassians,” Will barely muttered, meaning it as an argument but running out of steam.

They weren’t, of course. But that wasn’t the vedek’s point.

"These gardens, they are beautiful. They were maintained by the Cardassians because they wanted to enjoy their beauty for themselves. Does that not tell you that we can find the same thing beautiful then we can understand each other on a fundamental level. We can be friends? We can be lovers?”

Will shuddered, despite or perhaps because of the ache in his chest.

The vedek turned to him, serious but concerned. That was clear in his emotions as much as his expression.

“Treat him as an individual. Not as those you have known before. Base your opinion of him on how he treats you, not on how others have treated you.”

The vedek stood but then held up a hand to indicate that Will should remain and spend some time in contemplation. It wasn’t why he was there, but Will found he couldn’t argue against it, and he had just been given a lot of food for thought.

When the vedek was a few steps away, he turned back and said softly, “Forgive yourself, Will. And forgive him for things he might never have done. If we are to continue to live, we must do so with compassion and forgiveness.” With a wry smile he then added, “If he were not a Cardassian, how different might you have treated him in the time you have known him?”

Will took in a shuddering breath, a little too scared to admit the answer.

*

Time passed impossibly slowly, and Hann couldn’t help but wonder if the same had been true for Will when he had been off station. He flattered himself to think it might have been, if only to avoid the terrible pain that came with the thought that it might not.

Will Graham had become a cause of pain for him, he had realised.

A vulnerability, no matter how he tried to deny it. And as long as Will Graham was in his life, perhaps as long as he existed at all, Hann Lektor would not be able to return to Cardassia. And most especially, would not be in a position to resume his role with the Obsidian Order.

It would only take one slight threat towards the human, for Hann to pour all his resources into protecting him. In his imagination this took the form of a great house, perhaps like Enabrim Tain's or one of the more pompous Legates. He knew they had Will within those walls, tied down and being tortured. In his mind's eye he saw himself moving through the house slaying every Cardassian that stood between them, until he was drenched with their blood. He would find Will and stop at nothing to get him safely away.

Whilst he thought this, re-hemming pants that were just a fraction too long for Quark in their current state, he seemed the picture of tranquillity. Inside was an increasing turmoil of blood thirst and heartache as he awaited Will's safe return.

Surely, nothing terrible, perhaps not even anything remotely of note, could befall Will on Bajor. Even those still suspicious of the Federation and their motives for being there, would not attack one of their number. Surely.

Lektor took a breath and began to hum a pleasant tune whilst pushing away increasing thoughts of the ill fates that might have befallen Will.

He knew it was simply an overactive imagination, Will's transport being due back today had him on edge.

Would Will come to him? Would he call? Would he simply wait for them to run into each other? If he did come, would it simply be to see Abigail? Will Graham had become increasingly difficult to predict. Even with the turbo lift incident and Abigail - great manipulations which he was sure Will saw but had gone along with - he had not been certain Will would fall for them. Will surely saw the bluff but never called it. And that left him entirely unpredictable.

Hann blinked and roused himself from his thoughts when he realised he was being hailed.

"Lektor here," He replied and Sisko's voice came across the comm into the tailor's shop.

"Lektor. Report to my office."

"Certainly Commander, may I ask-"

"Now." The tone wasn't sharp but brooked no argument, and a moment later the line went dead.

Lektor set the material down and frowned. He wasn't exactly welcome in Ops, so being called to Sisko's office was something of note.

And of course, his first thoughts went to Will. Illogically really, because if something had happened to Will, he would find out through station gossip, not from the Commanding Officer like a bereaved spouse. Lektor's stomach did a small flip at the thought.

He tidied the material and tried not to seem like he was rushing as he then left his shop and found the most direct turbolift to Ops.

Whatever the reason he had been called, it was clear that the senior staff were as unaware as he was. They looked at him curiously, some of them suspiciously, which he couldn't blame them for in the least.

And whilst he continued to present a very cool demeanour, there was increasing inner turmoil. The perfect Cardassian suit he had formed over years of clandestine operations was all that stood between him and rage of emotions inside. The ones that became even harder to take hold of as he climbed the steps to the office and saw that Will stood inside, talking with the Commander.

Will.

Whilst elated to see his friend again, Lektor couldn't help the suspicion he now felt. Had this been a ruse the whole time? Had Will let him believe he was being successful in manipulating him and, dare he say, hoping to court him? Had he an agenda of his own with Starfleet that was about to come to a head?

Although Lektor felt that he knew Will better than that, and wouldn't be so easily fooled, he recalled his thoughts of not ten minutes earlier, that he couldn't predict this human. And this one alone.

"Come," Sisko called before Lektor had even reached the door, which then promptly admitted him and closed behind.

"Commander, always a pleasure," Lektor bowed his head in greeting and then turned to Will, not about to give away any of his feelings. "Doctor."

Will nodded back a greeting, but his jaw flexed nonetheless.

"Okay Doctor, Lektor's here now. Are you going to tell me what all this is about? You seemed pretty adamant that we meet as soon as your transport docked, and that Lektor be present."

Sisko wasn't perhaps as gruff as the first few weeks on the station, but Lektor admired his no nonsense approach to things. Especially now, when he wanted nothing more than to skip to the end of this conversation.

Lektor looked curiously at Will as they both stood in front of the Commander's desk, but Will was now looking resolutely at Sisko. For his part, Sisko was playing over a ball in his hands and frowning as though bewildered by the whole situation.

After all, what on earth could be the connection between Will Graham, his trip to Bajor to collect bugs, and the Cardassian tailor, or spy, depending on who you asked?

Will cleared his throat before finally speaking.

"I, uh, wanted to request that you revoke my clearance level, Commander."

Sisko and Lektor wore matching frowns, both waiting for Will to elaborate before Sisko finally let out a heavy sigh, set down the ball onto a little pedestal and replied, "Okay, I'll

bite. Why would I want to do that?"

"I have no need for access at the clearance level I have now, and if there should ever be such a requirement, I can contact Dax for further assistance. But as I'm not a senior officer and it is not called for in my daily duties, my access can be-"

Sisko stopped Will by holding up a hand.

"Right," He drawled, flicking a curious glance between the two of them. "That's not really answering my question, and I'm still pretty confused as to why he's here." Sisko nodded to Lektor.

Will cleared his throat again, still looking ahead, though now Lektor realised he wasn't looking at Sisko but focusing on the stars outside.

Will swallowed, "I recommend my clearance downgrade as a preemptive action. I suspect that you will be requested to do so by Starfleet Command if and when they are informed of my… my friendship with Mr Lektor."

"Right," Sisko drawled again, but this time was near squinting at Will as though to try and read the situation. "Are you trying to let me know, Doctor, that you and Mr Lektor are in a relationship?"

That was the point at which Hann's chest thudded so strongly that he started to cough and splutter, looking at the two humans who were now both, apparently, somewhat uncomfortable.

When Will didn't answer, Sisko continued, perhaps realising he was going to have to draw this information from the man.

"Okay, so you're friends? That's… There's no issues with that. But are you saying... So, you have a romantic relationship?"

Lektor blinked, looking at Will and waiting for a reply to what seemed like as much a preemptive answer as the downgrade in clearance.

"Yes." Will answered, clipped.

Lektor's legs went a little weak at the knee, but he held firm, not intending to allow the Commander to see any sign of weakness. Which, it occurred to him then, was perhaps the reason for all of this. Perhaps Will wanted to admit his romantic interest in a contained environment on which neither of them could act?

"Well, that's… news." Sisko struggled to find the words, whilst also looking more than faintly amused.

"Isn't it." Lektor quipped back, unsure exactly what he was expected to do.

"I just thought, if there were any questions you needed to ask us, any concerns you had as Commanding Officer, then we should both be here for it." Will said, tone lacking in any

emotion. A human suit of his own, Lektor's chest swelled with adoration at the thought.

Sisko seemed speechless for a moment and then shook his head, "No, no. None of my business." He waved a dismissive hand. "I think you're right about the security clearance, no offence Lektor."

"None taken," He replied, still reeling, even if he wasn't letting it show.

"But other than that? Maybe just… dial down the lover's tiffs? Odo has received more than one concerned comment about you practically growling at each other in the replimat. Which I guess makes all the more sense now."

"Oh, I believe Will was doing all the growling, sir." Lektor replied.

Sisko shook his head, amused, baffled, perhaps appreciating a break from the mundane?

"Okay, well. Dismissed."

Will turned and walked out the door without even looking at Lektor.

*

Will didn't miss the look on Hann's face when he requested the turbolift bypass the promenade for the habitat ring. To Lektor's quarters, in fact.

"Remind you of that night in the pylon?" Will asked, not cold but calmer than he'd felt in a long time. At peace in some ways, and very attuned to the truth of it all.

Hann, for his part, startled a little at being addressed. He could sense from the Cardassian that he had been caught very much off guard by the events of the last ten minutes. Will had thought long and hard on it before realising it was what he needed to do. And that he needed Hannibal to witness it.

Not least because, admitting that their relationship had clearly been romantic for much longer than Will wanted to think about, would have left the smug asshole preening. Doing it in front of the Commander? What better way to get him on the back foot?

"Hmm?" Lektor blinked and looked at him with wide eyes.

"Being in a turbolift together. Every time, it sort of reminds me of that first night."

"Oh, yes. I suppose so." Lektor still didn't seem to have recovered.

"Yeah, that night that Morn suggested I go up for a walk. And you just so happened to jump in my ride. I asked him a few nights later, why he'd suggested it. You know what he said?" Will asked with a light tease in his otherwise level tone.

Hann swallowed and licked his lips, fixing Will with a cold look, the sort he got when Hann was being defensive.

“He told me that someone else had suggested it to him as a nice place for a walk. You, in fact. And I guess I should probably be flattered.” Will’s heart started to pound a little as he took a step into Hann’s space. “That you went to the trouble of actually inducing anxiety in yourself, because yes I have no doubt that was absolutely real. All in order to access the programme that, Quark informed me, you had asked about a few weeks prior. *My* programme. One where you then hoped I would seek refuge when our encounter induced my own issues.”

Hann’s mouth twitched though he had the good grace not to actually smile.

“I recall you once telling me you don’t trust coincidence, so I assume you won’t expect me too either?” Will’s tone was stern but he couldn’t hide the hint of amusement.

“To think, after all this time, all our lunches together, all our walks with Abigail, you still don't trust me. There's hope for you yet, doctor.” Lektor teased.

“It seems I played right into your hands. Then, at least.” Will cocked a brow.

“Yes, well.” Lektor finally began, “You were the only remotely interesting person on this station. You can’t blame me for trying.”

Will quirked a brow, “Trying. Hmm.” He huffed, his mouth twitching up into a smile. “Did you get the outcome you desire? Mr Lektor?

"Outcome? To perhaps change your mind about herpetology?" Lektor teased.

“Amongst other things…” Will’s voice was gruff as he moved closer again, backing Lektor to the wall. Their lips almost close enough to steal a kiss.

"I will admit my interest in you has changed several times since we met.” Hann replied, breathless. His gaze flicked from Will’s mouth to his eyes and back again. “First I was merely curious, and then perhaps I could see how I might use you to my advantage. But then we spoke and any thought other than my own selfish desire to know you better, was lost. I have always been truthful in this point. I have never lied about how much your company stimulates me. An oasis in the desolation of my exile.”

"I'm not sure how I feel about being a replacement for Cardassian company." Will scoffed but didn’t move back.

Hann chuckled, "You are more stimulating than any of my own kind, my dear. Don't mistake my flattery for comparison. There is none to be made, you are beyond comparison."

"I'm never going to forget what you are." Will countered.

"I wouldn't expect you to." Hann replied, breathless.

“I am going to let go of my misplaced hatred though. Everything that was holding me back. Holding us back.” Will’s words were quiet, almost spoken against Hann’s lips. So close he could feel the cold coming off of them.

“Perhaps, after all, you *can* ignore the worst in me in order to continue enjoying the best.” It wasn’t a question.

Will’s immediate response was a low growl in his chest. He pressed the whole of his body against Lektor’s feeling every ridge of the man’s exoskeleton.

“We’re both capable of being monsters. If I can live with that in you, I can live with that in me.” Will admitted, to himself as much as anything, before finally pressing his lips to Hann’s.

They were soft, cold. Dry. And they opened immediately to him and allowed their differing temperatures to meet. They both groaned into the kiss that, he now realised, had been inevitable for longer than he cared to admit.

Hann’s hands slid up into Will’s hair, gripping lightly as he deepened the kiss and then-

“Habitat Ring,” The computer announced, and opened the doors to release them, tumbling out as though plunging over a cliff’s edge, to their future.

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